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# Making Collaborative Innovation Accountable

Professor Eva Sørensen



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# Making collaborative innovation accountable

By Eva Sørensen

## Abstract:

*The public sector is increasingly expected to be innovative, but the prize for a more innovative public sector might be that it becomes difficult to hold public authorities to account for their actions. The article explores the tensions between innovative and accountable governance, describes the foundation for these tensions in different accountability models, and suggest directions to take in analyzing the accountability of collaborative innovation processes.*

## Introduction

Innovation is no longer exclusively perceived as a matter for private firms seeking to develop new sales techniques, production processes and products. The public sector is increasingly expected, not only to encourage and support private sector innovation, but also to produce innovative public policies and services, and do so in new and creative ways. Hence, Western governments are expected to increase their capacity to produce innovative governance. However, at the same time governments must meet a series of other demands specific to the public sector. Since efforts to promote the innovative capacity of the public sector might collide with some of these other objectives, current studies of public innovation should not only focus on measuring and advancing the innovative capacities of public governance. They should also consider if and how efforts to enhance public innovation collide with attempts to uphold other important normative standards of good governance.

This article analyses the relationship between public innovation and accountability, and aims to uncover the tensions between these two normative goals in order to clarify to what extent and how efforts to make public governance more innovative affects the level of accountability in the public sector. The analyses departs from the assumption that the tension between innovation and accountability is considerable due to the fact that *public innovation demands for a particularly high level of accountability but makes it notoriously difficult to provide*. The need to hold innovators of public governance to account is high because innovation involves risk taking and a departure from well-established and often widely accepted perceptions and patterns of action. This high level of

accountability is difficult to provide, however, because innovation is an open ended, dynamic and unpredictable activity, which often, as we shall see, involves collaboration between multiple actors. Such activities are notoriously difficult to hold to account with reference to models of accountability that demands for mandated authorization of decision makers and a clear separation of powers and responsibilities between the involved public authorities.

The article examines the tension between calls for innovative and accountable public governance. It shows how the standards by which public authorities are held to account with limited success have been reformulated towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in an attempt to reduce the tensions between accountability and innovation, and propose ways to go in developing a model of accountability that identify ways to hold those involved in public innovation account. The article is structured as follows: First, it defines the concept of accountability, and draws an outline of the traditional model for holding public authorities to account. Next, follow an analysis of the accountability model that was advanced by the New Public Management paradigm in the 80s and 90s. Then I discuss the innovative potential of some of the collaborative forms of governance that goes under the name of New Public Governance. The article concludes with an analysis of a new strand of theory that seeks for ways to hold collaborative governance processes, and a first attempt is made to develop a model for holding collaborative innovation processes to account.

### **The concept of accountability**

The idea that public authorities should be held to account for their actions, is a core feature of modern political thought. But what does it mean to be held to account, and according to what standards are different public actors held to account? The concept of accountability is used in different ways and with various meanings by social science theorists as well as by public authorities and others involved in public governance. (Behn, 2001: 3-5). Mark Bovens (2006: 9) offers an uncontroversial definition of the concept of accountability when he states that it signifies *the relationship between an actor and a forum in which the actor has an obligation to explain and justify his or her conduct, the forum can pose questions and pass judgment, and the actor may face consequences*.

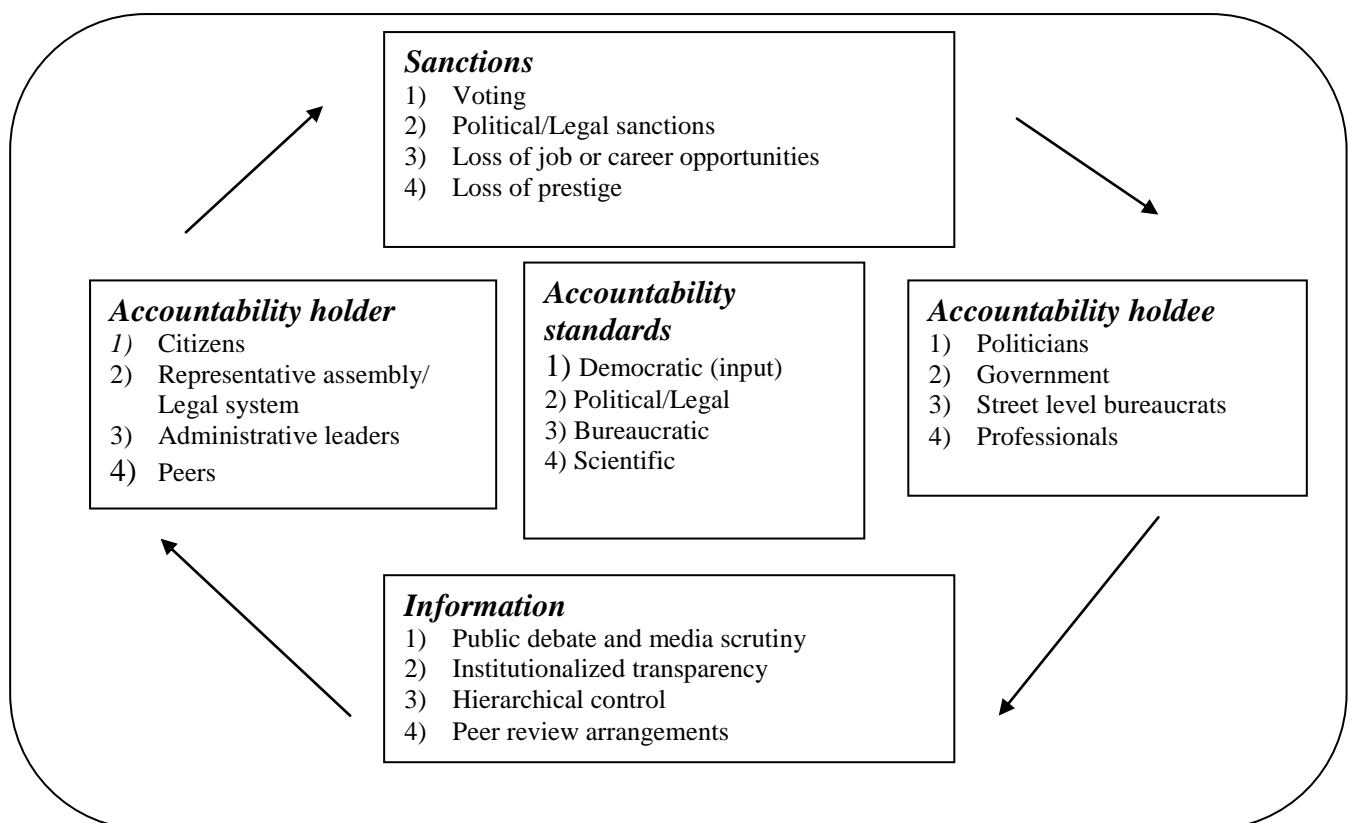
Much in the same vein Robert Behn (2001) defines accountability as a relationship between an *accountability holdee* and an *accountability holder* that grants the latter the information and sanctioning powers needed to evaluate and subsequently punish or reward the former on the basis of a mutually accepted set of standards (Behn, 2001: 2-6). Such relationships can both be informal or formalized. In modern political systems public authorities are held to account by highly formalized accountability standards. A codification of such standards can undoubtedly help to specify and stabilize the rules and norms that regulate the interaction between public authorities and those who hold them to account. However, as pointed out by organization sociologists (Powell and Dimaggio, 1991; Scott, 1987), neo-institutionalists (March and Olsen, 1989) and governance researchers (Esmark, 2007; Torfing, Peters, Pierre and Sørensen, 2011), informal accountability standards continue to play an important role in holding public authorities to account. As such an analysis of the level of accountability in public governance processes calls for a study of the formal and informal standards that apply when different public authorities step into the role as accountability holdees that are sanctioned by informed accountability holders. As we shall see, there are many

accountability standards and accountability loops between accountability holders and accountability holdees at play when public authorities are held to account.

## The traditional accountability model

Seen from the point of view of a traditional accountability model, at least four different accountability standards are involved when different public authorities are held to account for their actions: Voters hold politicians to account with reference to democratic standards; the judiciary system and the parliament hold governments to account with reference to legal and political standards; leading administrators hold street level bureaucrats to account on the basis of bureaucratic rules and regulations; and public professionals are held to account by their peers with reference to specific scientific standards. Each of these four accountability standards regulates one out of four different accountability loops through a particular set of formal and informal procedures. Hence, the traditional accountability model, which is visualized in figure 1, consists of four institutionalized accountability loops between an accountability holder and an accountability holdee.

**Figure 1: The traditional accountability model**



Loop 1 evolve around democratic accountability standards, loop 2 around political and legal accountability standards, loop 3 around bureaucratic accountability standards, and loop 4 around scientific standards. Each of these standards installs a linkage between an accountability holder and accountability holdee.

Accountability loop 1 places voters in the role as accountability holders and politicians in the role as accountability holdees. Voters grant politicians a mandate to make decisions on their behalf in exchange for information about what the politicians have done so far and promise to do next, and politicians who fail to satisfy their voters are sanctioned at Election Day. The criteria by which voters hold politicians to account are defined by a set of *input side oriented democratic standards* sketching out what politicians are mandated to do, what responsibilities and obligations they have, and what kind of information and sanctioning powers should be available to the citizens. Although these standards are generally in line with those advocated by the model of representative democracy, they vary somewhat from one national and cultural context to the next as numerous comparative studies of democratic regimes have pointed out (Almond and Verba, 1963; Leijphart, 1977).

When first elected, politicians move into the second accountability loop. In doing so, they take on the role of accountability holders who share the task of holding the government to account with the legal system. The role of the representative assembly of politicians is to ensure that the government implements political programs, while the legislature checks that the government governs in accordance with the law. The degree to which a representative assembly and legal system is able to hold a government to account depends on the level of transparency and publicity in the governance process, as well as on the informal and formal measures that they can take to punish a government which misbehaves. There are two related accountability standards involved when governments are held to account. The representative assembly holds a government to account with reference to a set of generally accepted *political standards* defining what governments can do and not do in given situations. The judicial system on its side holds governments to account with reference to *legal standards* codified in legal documents and above all in the constitution.

In the implementation phase of the policy process, the third accountability loop that draws on bureaucratic accountability standards places street level bureaucrats in the role as accountability holdees and administrative leaders as accountability holders. Administrative leaders transform laws into administrative rules and procedures that determine what the individual street level bureaucrat should do, and check whether and how they abide to these bureaucratic rules and procedures. The administrative leaders obtain information about how street level bureaucrats are acting through the institutionalization of a detailed hierarchical and highly sectorized control system, and failure to deliver is punished with loss of job or career opportunities.

A fourth accountability loop places public professionals such as medics, lawyers, teachers and planners in the position as accountability holdees who are held to account by their professional peers. The peers hold the professionals to account with reference to a set of *scientific standards* for what is considered as the qualitatively best practice, and obtain the necessary knowledge about the actions of the accountability holdees through different peer review systems, and sanction those who do not abide to the specified standards by means of a variety of grading systems that harm their standing and reputation among other members of the profession.

It should be noted that the four accountability loops are analytical abstractions. In real life contexts accountability holders draw on more than one and sometimes all of the four accountability standards in their efforts to hold different public authorities to account. However, in this context it is

particularly relevant to note that *the traditional accountability model relies on the existence of stable and highly institutionalized patterns of interaction between accountability holders and accountability holdees organized around pre-given and broadly recognized accountability standards as well as clear and stable divisions of labor between actors involved in particular phases in the governance process*. As we shall see, the recent efforts to enhance the innovative capacities of the public sectors in many Western democracies have transformed the political systems in a way that makes it increasingly difficult to apply the traditional accountability model.

### **The New Public Management accountability model**

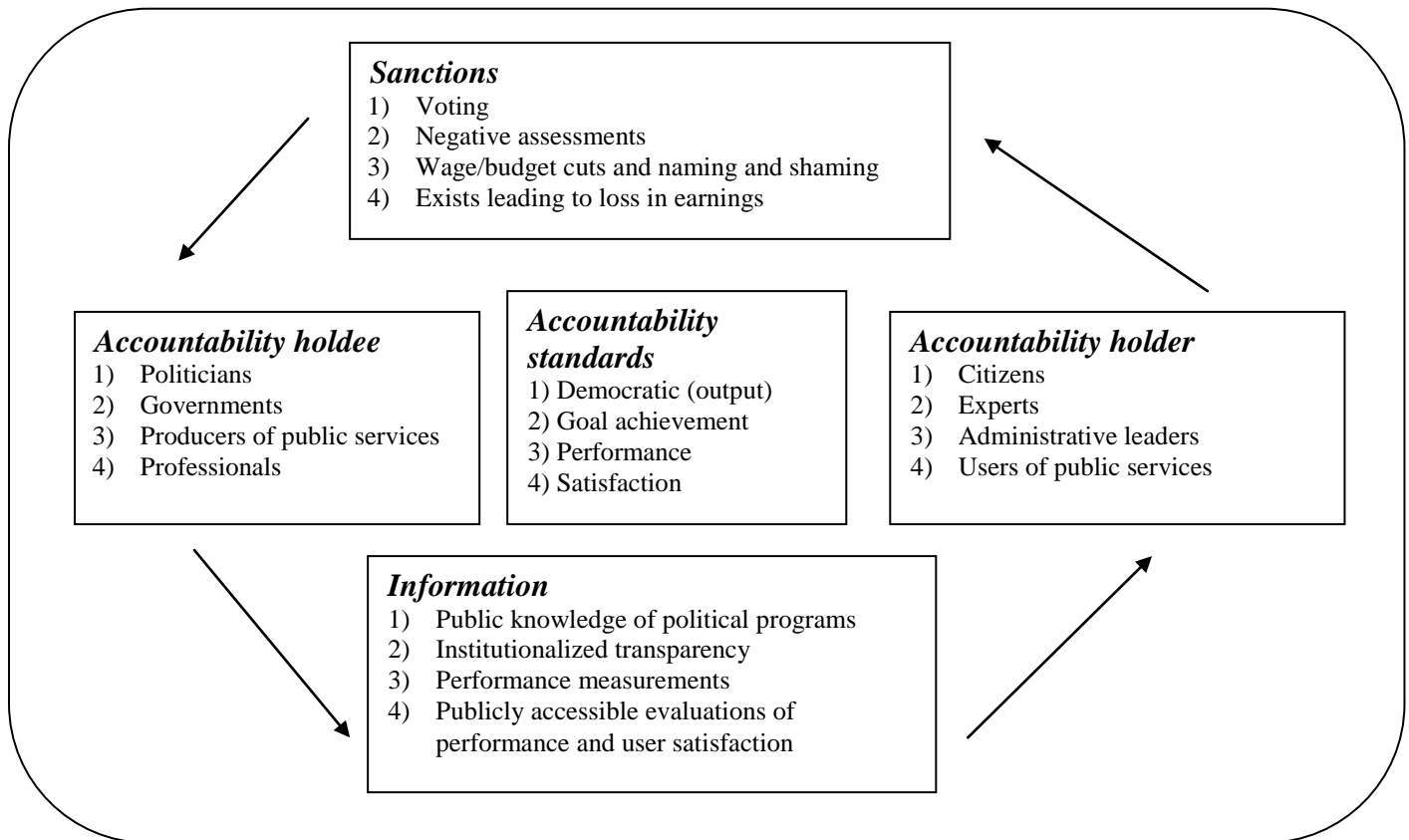
In the late 1970s and early 1980s Western democracies faced what some have defined as an ungovernability crisis (Mayntz, 1986; Kooiman, 1993). Many governments experienced severe financial problems and had trouble reaching the goals they had set for themselves. This ungovernability crisis initiated a search for new ways of perceiving and exercising public governance and triggered a series of public sector reforms that aimed to enhance the effectiveness and innovative capacity of the public sector. The reforms took their departure in a critique of bureaucratic forms of government for being inefficient. This critique was not least inspired by Anthony Downs' (1967) ossification hypothesis stating that public bureaucracies over time become less efficient and adaptable to societal changes and new conditions for public governance. This ossification has to do with the fact that public bureaucracies tend to grow and that large-scale bureaucracies spend all their energy and resources on internal coordination and external boundary wars.

Down's thoughts inspired the development of *principal-agent* and *Public Choice theory* (Niskanen, 1987) that gave direction to the *New Public Management reforms* of the 80s and 90s. The main aims of these reforms were to make the public sector more efficient and innovative through the introduction of new forms of public management based on incentives steering, performance assessments and competition (Hood, 1991; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004). The need to make the public sector not only more efficient, but also more innovative was particularly highlighted in David Osborne and Ted Gaebler's famous book (1992) *Reinventing Government*. The idea driving this new public management thinking is that the efficiency and innovative capacity of the public sector can be enhanced by placing politicians in a position where they can focus on policy innovation (steering) and public and private service providers are put under pressure to find new innovative ways of enhancing the efficiency and of public service provision (rowing).

The NPM reforms did not only radically transform the institutional set up of the public sector in countries such as the USA, UK, Australia, New Zealand, The Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark. It also introduced a new model for holding public authorities to account.



**Figure 2: The NPM accountability model**



The NPM model reformulates the four accountability loops in ways that mix the traditional accountability loops characterizing the institutions of representative democracy with accountability models well known from the private sector i.e. an incentive driven administrative hierarchy and a competition driven service production. This mixed model installs new accountability standards, and a reshuffling and reinterpretation of the roles and functions of the different accountability holders and holdees.

The first accountability loop between citizens and politicians is still intact. What have changed are the number of governance tasks and the content of the democratic standards by which politicians are held to account. First, the NPM-model reduces the number of governance tasks that politicians are involved in to that of formulating the overall policy objectives and budget conditions while leaving other governance tasks to other public authorities. This narrows down considerably the part of the governance process for which politicians can be held to account. Second, NPM rephrase the democratic standards by which voters are to hold politicians to account from input side considerations about whether or not politicians have been mandated to do what they do, to *democratic output-side* concerns about the extent to which politicians have launched policy programs dealing with problems that citizens perceive as important. In light of this rephrasing of the content of the democratic accountability standard, it becomes important for citizens to get

information about what actions politicians have taken to solve policy problems that citizens perceive as important. In consequence, the role of the media is increasingly to provide information about the content of policy programs and policy initiatives launched by different politicians.

The second accountability loop, which aims to hold governments to account, is also affected by the growing focus on outcomes. Although the legal system and the representative assembly is still expected to play a role in holding governments to account, the main focus of attention in the NPM is on *goal achievement*: Are governments able to reach the goals they have set for themselves? This shift in accountability standard from input to outcomes brings new accountability holders on to the scene. Evaluating the extent to which a government has reached its goals and done so within the budgetary limits is a complex matter and arguments for and against can always be contested. Due to the complexity of the matter, the messenger tends to become more important than the argument. Therefore, the media, opposition parties and different interest groups bring all sorts of experts onto the scene as accountability holders in an attempt to hold governments to account for their (dis-)ability to attain their political goals. Governments on their side use other experts to give such accounts.

The accountability standards that are involved when actors within the administrative system hold each other to account have also changed. Thus the bureaucratic standards focusing on rule following have been pushed aside by *performance standards*, and the accountability holdee is no longer only the individual street level bureaucrat. Also public agencies and private firms involved in public service delivery have become accountability holdees. In holding street level bureaucrats and service producing agencies to account administrative leaders are less interested in the extent to which street level bureaucrats and public and private agencies follow specific rules and procedures than in the degree to which they have been able to produce desired outcomes. In accordance with this line of thinking the NPM-reform program offer a variety of ways in which administrative leaders can accommodate those who perform well and punish those who do not.

The final accountability loop has also been made subject to radical reinterpretation. Scientific accountability standards have been exchanged with a *user satisfaction standard* that has pushed the professional peers aside as accountability holders and given this role to the users of public services. In order to be able to hold those professionals who provide public services to account, the users of these services are granted full information about the character and quality of that service and the level of satisfaction among other users as well as the capacity to exit service providers that are not to their liking.

In sum it is fair to conclude that the NPM accountability model offers a new analytical approach to holding public authorities to account that takes departure from radically different standards than the traditional accountability model, and brings new accountability holders and accountability holdees into the game. It should be noted, however, that the NMP accountability model, like the traditional model of accountability, is ideal typical in the Weberian meaning of the word. It highlights a set of increasingly used criteria for holding public authorities to account knowing that reality is much more complex. In reality, contemporary Western democracies draw on a messy mix between the traditional accountability model and the NPM model. Accordingly, different interpretations of the accountability standards co-exist, and so does the different role images that these competing interpretations assign the involved actors.

The co-existence between the two models produces confusion regarding what is to be given priority i.e. input side or output side democracy, legality or efficiency, scientific quality or user satisfaction. This confusion materializes itself in all sorts of battles for power between those involved in public governance. Despite these confusions, however, the compatibility between the models is considerable, which has to do with the fact that NPM share the perception with the traditional model of accountability *that it is possible to predefine a set of stable standards by which to hold public authorities to account and to establish a clear division of labor between the actors involved in the four accountability loops.*

### **Collaborative accountability and governance**

Seen from an innovation perspective, this idea represents a barrier for enhancing public innovation. NPM is a case in point as the reformulated accountability loops it installs has become a barrier for accomplishing what the reform program set out to do: to enhance the public sector's efficiency and innovation capacity. With regard to whether or not the public sector has become more efficient, the jury is still out (Dowding, 2003; Hoque, Arends and Alexander, 2004; Boyne, 2007). While incentives steering, competition and increased demand side pressures have obliged public authorities to work harder and faster, a series of negative side effects have been identified. Among these side effects count the time spent on evaluating outcomes, and the growing demand for high quality public services that the focus on user satisfaction has triggered.

The degree to which NPM has enhanced the public sector's innovation capacity has also been questioned (Newman, Raine and Skelcher, 2001; Rolland, 2005; Halvorson et al, 2005; Haugnes, 2003). NPM is among other things said to hamper innovation because it establishes a sharp institutional divide between politics and production e.g. between policy innovation and service innovation. While policy innovation is considered as a matter for politicians (and leading administrative executives) in the initial stages of the governance process, service innovation is viewed as a matter for street level bureaucrats and other actors involved in implementing public policy (Hartley, 2005; Sørensen, 2011). The purpose of maintaining this moderated version of the parliamentary chain of governance organized around a rational decision chain where goal definition precedes implementation is, among other things, to be able to hold different public authorities to account for a specific portfolio of governance tasks and responsibilities.

This strategy for holding decision makers to account is problematic seen from an innovation perspective because it reduces the capacity for policy and service innovation. The NPM reforms have undoubtedly given *politicians* (and leading administrative executives) more time and space to formulate new innovative political strategies and visions. However, the reforms have also reduced the politicians' access to sharing knowledge and ideas with those who engage directly in the implementation and provision of public governance. Politicians are governing at a distance, and this hampers their capacity to innovate policies in light of knowledge about what works and what does not work in actual governance processes (Sørensen, 2006). They are left isolated at the top of the hierarchy with little else to drive policy innovation than party competition and spin. With regard to *those providing public services* they have become caught up in a post-bureaucratic system of standardized performance assessments and evaluation procedures that measure and reward them for performing according to 'best practice' rather than searching for new and innovative ways of providing services.

Around the turn of the century, public sector reformers became increasingly aware of the negative side effects that the NPM reforms tend to have e.g. the rising demand for services and the barriers to policy and service innovation. The surging critique of NPM raised by the supporters of what Stephen Osborne (2010) denotes the New Public Governance (NPG) approach, has brought collaborative forms of governance into focus as a means to enhance the sustainability and innovative capacity of the public sector. This new approach view collaboration between different public authorities as well as between all relevant stakeholders as an important means to make public governance more sustainable and innovative. Some traces of this line of thinking are already present in NPM's advocacy for public-private partnerships and quasi-markets based on relational contracts, The New Public Governance approach takes this perspective further by advocating for the involvement of a much wider range of public and private stakeholders such as politicians, public administrators, professionals, experts, voluntary associations, private firms and citizens in collaborative governance processes.

Collaboration between a broad variety of stakeholders is expected to enhance the sustainability of public governance by engaging stakeholders directly in governance processes in ways involve them in balancing policy goals against available resources and enhance their willingness to contribute to solving complex governance tasks. In addition, collaboration is expected to promote the formation of linkages between those involved in policy innovation and service innovation in ways that spur creative, well-informed and committed formulation, implementation and dissemination of innovative ideas. The innovation potentials of collaborative governance rely on the assumption that dialogue between actors with different kinds of knowledge, experiences and perspectives disturb routinized patterns of thought and action in ways that make the involved actors open to pursue, develop and adopt new ways of understanding, approaching and performing governance tasks (Sørensen and Torfing, 2011).

The recent efforts to enhance collaborative governance in many Western democracies (see e.g. British Government, 2010 and British Home Office, 2010; City of Oakland, 2009) have found inspiration in the growing interest in interactive governance and collaborative management among social science researchers over the last 15 years (O'Toole, 1997; Agranoff and McGuire, 2001; Milward and Provan 2001; Vigoda, 2002; Klijn and Koppenjan, 2004; Hartley, 2005; Torfing et al, 2012). These theories suggest that governance networks and other interactive forms of governance have an innovation potential, and that public authorities at different levels do not necessarily have to take the full responsibility for innovating public policies and services. Collaborative forms of governance divide the burden of making the public sector more efficient and innovative with public and private actors who possess knowledge, competences or resources relevant for formulating and implementing efficient and innovative public policies and services.

Theories of interactive governance and collaborative management, however, stress that a successful use of collaboration as a driver of efficient governance in general and public innovation in particular, calls for the strategic creation, institutionalization and management of the interactive arenas in which collaborative policy and service innovation are to take place (Klijn and Koppenjan, 2004; Nambisan, 2005; Roberts and Bradley, 1991). Governance theorists denote this form of governance 'metagovernance' and define it as the governance of self-governance (Jessop, 2002; Sørensen and Torfing, 2007, 2009; Meuleman, 2008). This form of public governance takes

departure from the assumption that today's governance tasks tends to be so complex that no one actor has sufficient knowledge to solve them. They are best solved by involving and granting a considerable autonomy to self-regulating collaborative governance arenas in which affected and relevant stakeholders negotiate shared goals and pool their resources and insights (Sørensen and Triantafyllou, 2009).

The fact that self-regulating collaborative governance arenas enjoy some degree of autonomy does not imply that they cannot be governed, but it demands for a specific kind of metagovernance that is exercised through the strategic shaping and regulation of self-regulating governance arenas. Governance theories identify four main types of metagovernance that has a role to play in governing collaborative arenas (Sørensen and Torfing, 2007; 2009): 1) *institutional design of governance arenas* (composition, procedures and competences); 2) *political, budgetary, legal and discursive framing* (setting the agenda, provision of available resources, establishment of legal conditions, and construction of storylines that makes collaboration meaningful); 3) *facilitation of collaboration* (conflict mediation and provision of administrative assistance); and 4) *participation in collaborative governance* (influence without dominating, be the first to invest own resources and show trust).

While the NPM approach establishes a distinction between those who steer and those who row, governance theorists draw a line between those who metagovern and those who self-govern. Despite the undeniable similarities in these distinctions, the two approaches have different understandings of what this distinction entails. While the NPM approach views the relationship between those who steer and those who row as intrinsically hierarchical, the governance theorists view the relationship between those who metagovern and those who self-govern as interactive. Another difference between the two approaches to governance is that NPM invites fewer actors onto the governance scene than does the governance approach. NPM advocates for the formation of partnerships with private firms to participate in partnerships and place users of public services in the role as customers on a market of public services. In comparison, governance researchers stress the importance of including all relevant stakeholders as potential co-producers of public governance in general to participate in the collaboration processes.

The advocacy for an intense and ongoing interaction between stakeholders and levels of governance goes well in hand with the collaborative innovation approach. A systematic reliance on collaborative forms of governance as a means to enhance public innovation does, however, raise serious considerations about how to hold public authorities and other actors involved in policy and service innovation to account for their actions. Collaborative forms of governance are neither compatible with the traditional model nor the NPM model of accountability. First, in collaborative innovation processes the image of the rational decision chain which is the organizing principle for dividing responsibilities between different public authorities is difficult to maintain. Policy innovation and service innovation are intertwined in complex ways and tend to happen side by side rather than one after the other. Although some public authorities continue to be more involved in either policy innovation or service innovation the ongoing interaction, collaboration and dialogue between those involved in the two processes means that they become intertwined. Policies are inspired by attempts to innovative services, and the search for new services is conditioned by attempts to formulate new policies.

The crux of the matter is that it is difficult to decide who to hold to account for what when the governance process is no longer divided into distinct phases and responsibilities. Moreover, an involvement of different stakeholders e.g. politicians, public administrators, experts and citizens and private actors makes it difficult to determine what accountability standards to apply when and where. It is likely that the different participants will insist on evaluating collaboration processes with reference to the accountability standards that have traditionally dominated their domain. Politicians will refer to democratic or political accountability standards; public administrators with activate legal or performance related standards; and the professionals will focus on scientific quality or user satisfaction. Collaboration means that the institutionalized boundaries between the accountability domains become hard to draw, and are therefore determined by the power games that are played out in the collaborative processes themselves. Finally, the involvement of citizens and private actors such as business firms, voluntary organizations in collaborative innovation processes in the public sector triggers a need to develop accountability standards for how these actors can be held to account for their new role as co-governors.

### **How to make collaborative innovation accountable**

The misfit between the traditional and the NPM models of accountability and collaborative forms of governance calls for the development of an accountability model that sets standards and procedures for those involved in collaborative governance to account. The need for such a model is urgent due to the aforementioned increase in the systematic use of collaboration in general as well as in attempts to promote public sector innovation. Although governance theorists have time and again pointed out that there is an accountability problem related to the use of collaborative forms of governance, little has been said about how to deal with this problem (Kooiman, 1993; Rhodes, 1997: 21; Benz and Papadopoulos, 2006; Pierre and Peters, 2005: 115). Among those governance researchers who offer important new ideas about how to make collaborative governance accountable we find Mark Bovens, Thomas Schillemans and Paul 'T Hart (2008), Robert D. Behn (2001), Archon Fung (2004), Anders Esmark (2007) and James G. March and Johan P. Olsen (1995).

First, Bovens, Schillemans and 'T Hart (2008: 232) introduce a new accountability perspective that builds on *learning* as its main standard for assessing the degree to which governance processes are accountable. This learning model, which is highly relevant seen from an innovation perspective, view accountability as a measure of the extent to which public officials at all levels are able to develop the knowledge and competencies they need to deliver what they promise to deliver. In order to be viewed as accountable, public authorities must be in constant dialogue with relevant accountability forums composed of other public authorities and/or external stakeholders. These fora can on the one hand contribute to enhancing the public authorities' competencies and knowledge, and on the other hand hold them to account by demanding competent and convincing explanations. The learning perspective is valuable because it points out that ensuring accountability does not necessarily demand for an institutional separation of governance processes into distinct phases as indicated in the rational decision chain and fixed interpretations of the content of the involved accountability standards. Rather, the learning perspective highlights the need for ongoing dialogue and mutual learning between accountability holdees and accountability holders, and the constant interactive negotiation of what accountability standards are the most relevant in a given situation and how it should be interpreted. This interactive learning perspective indicates that it might be

possible to reduce the tension between the innovation and accountability ambition by putting pressure on decision makers to provide competent accounts for their actions in an ongoing dialogue with competent stakeholders.

Second, Robert D. Behn (2001: 1999) advocates for the introduction of a *360 degree perspective* on public accountability. This perspective discards the view that a given public authority can be sufficiently held to account through the institutionalization of one accountability loop based on one accountability standard and a fixed relationship between an accountability holder and an accountability holdee. In today's complex governance processes, the borderlines between the domains in which different public authorities reign are incessantly transgressed and under redefinition, and the roles as accountability holder and accountability holdee is constantly shifting. Therefore, there is an accelerating need to hold public authorities to account by more than one accountability standard and for a dynamic and situated appointment of role positions. Behn's 360 accountability perspective goes well in hand with collaborative innovation processes as the involved stakeholders draw on different accountability standards, and change between the role as accountability holder and accountability holdee at different stages in the governance process.

Third, Archon Fung (2004) has introduced the notion of *accountable autonomy* in order to point out how high ranking public authorities can hold self-governing collaborative arenas consisting of public and private stakeholders to account through interactive delegation and evaluation procedures. In contrast to the standardized performance measurements proposed by NPM, these procedures institutionalize a close and ongoing dialogue between metagoverning public authorities and various groups of stakeholders engaged in developing and implementing new innovative policies and services. This accountability perspective is important in this context because it suggests how policy innovation and service innovation can become interlinked through accountability models that promote dialogue between those involved in the former and those involved in the latter.

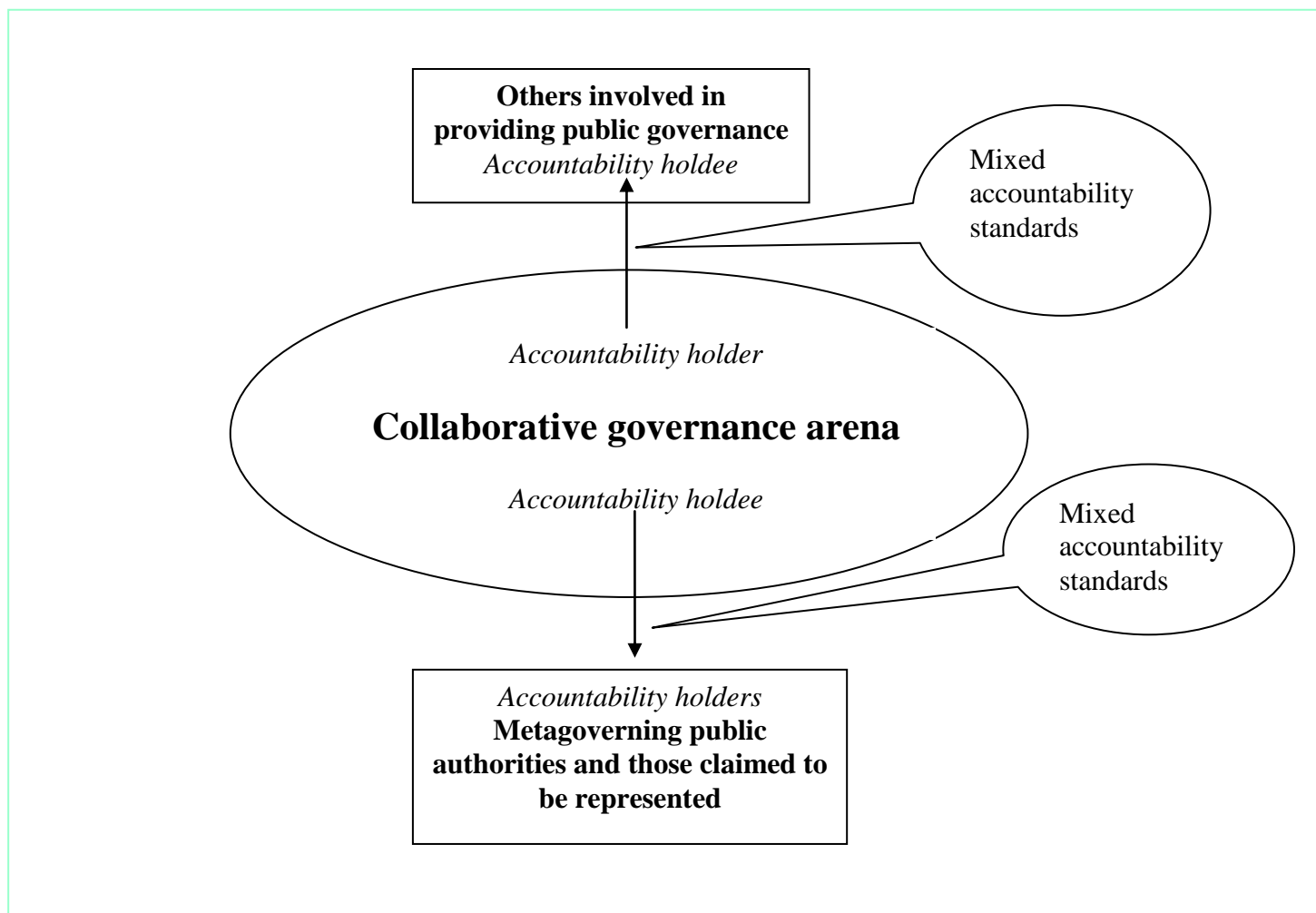
Fourth, Anders Esmark (2007) argues that although governance networks and other collaborative governance arenas often have an important role to play as accountability holders vis-à-vis public authorities, they should also in many situations be seen as accountability holdees. When placed in this role, collaborative governance arenas are accountable to the extent that they can be said to represent somebody or something. According to this *representation perspective* on accountability, collaborative governance arenas are accountable if the participants make such claims and if those claims are accepted by an informed and empowered object of representation. Seen from a collaborative innovation perspective this understanding of accountability is important because it points to ways in which those involved in collaborative innovation processes can be held to account by a plurality of accountability holders that draw on different accountability standards.

Finally, James March and Johan P. Olsen (1995) point to how the complexity and interactive character of contemporary governance processes make it difficult to determine who is accountable for what. This counts for governance processes in general and for collaborative governance arenas in particular. The best way of ensuring accountability is to put pressure, not so much on the individual participants as on the collaborative governance arenas. Seen from this accountability perspective, those participating in collaborative innovation should be held collectively to account for their actions. In doing so they must produce a collective account of the problem definitions that have initiated the collaboration, the applied strategies for dealing with these problems, the activities

launched to implement these strategies, and the outcomes that has been produced. This *collective accountability approach* is valuable in this context because it pinpoints the importance of establishing an audience or accountability holder that holding governance arenas involved in collaborative innovation collectively to account.

In sum, the five theoretical contributions each provide important insights that can inform the development of a model for holding those involved in collaborative innovation processes to account. First, the theories point out that a context dependent mix of accountability standards are at play when collaborative governance processes are being held to account. The precise mix depends on the mix of actors involved in the collaboration process: When politicians and citizens are involved political and democratic standards tend to be viewed as relevant; when public administrators participate bureaucratic and performance related standards are activated; and when professionals and experts participate, scientific standards tends to enter the arena. Second, the new accountability theories point out that collaborative governance arenas play an important role both as accountability holder and as accountability holdee. This double role is indicates in figure 3:

**Figure 3: Model for holding collaborative governance processes to account**





Studies of the degree to which collaborative governance processes are accountable should, first, seek to clarify what accountability standards, if any, are activated in attempts to hold those involved in collaborative governance processes to account as this can help to clarify not only if but also how such actors are held to account. In addition, it should be clarified how these standards have been established. Second, it is relevant to analyze the role that collaborative governance arenas play in holding the many public and private actors who are involved in different aspects and phases in a collaborative governance processes to account in light of particular accountability mixes. Finally, studies should be made of how collaborative governance arenas are held to account by metagovernors as well as by those actors, collaborative governance arenas claim to represent in light of the mix of accountability standards that these accountability holders view as relevant.

## Conclusion

This article set out to analyze the tensions between the current efforts to enhance the innovative capacity of the public sector and the normative demand for accountable, public governance. This tension is particularly problematic because the need to hold governance processes that break with tradition and routine is particularly in need of accountability. The analysis of the traditional accountability model and the NPM model illuminated that the tension between accountability and innovation appears as insoluble because these models link accountability to the presence of pre-given accountability standards, and clear and stable assignments of the roles as accountability holder and accountability holdee. This modeling explains why the NPM reform program, despite its intentions, ended up producing a governance structure that hampers public innovation.

In contrast, new forms of collaborative governance, conceptualized as New Public Governance, hold a considerable innovation potential, but what is more questionable is whether it is possible to hold collaborative governance processes to account. Seen from the traditional and NPM models the answer is no, but a new stand of governance theories aim to develop a new model for holding those involved in collaborative governance processes to account. An attempt has been made to use these theories as a stepping stone in a first attempt to develop a model by which collaborative governance processes to account and thereby reduce the tensions between accountable and innovative public governance.

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